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DEPT FOR G/IWI, Andrea Bottner

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [KWMN](#) [PLUM](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [TN](#)  
SUBJECT: EMBASSY SUVA NOMINATION FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE  
AWARD - TONGA

REF: STATE 126072

¶1. Embassy Suva is pleased and proud to nominate Mrs. Betty Blake, Coordinator of the Legal Literacy Project of the Tonga Catholic Women's League for the Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award. Mrs. Blake has been notified of her nomination.

¶2. Mrs. Blake's particulars are as follows:

Betty Blake  
Coordinator  
Legal Literacy Project  
DOB: May 27, 1941

Contact Information:  
Legal Literacy Project  
Box 1978, Nuku'alofa, Tonga  
Tel: (676) 25 991; Fax: (676) 25991  
Email: [llp2841@kalianet.to](mailto:llp2841@kalianet.to)

¶3. Justification: Betty Blake has been a powerful advocate for women's and children's human rights in Tonga for more than ten years. A mother of five grown children, Ms. Blake decided in 1996 to give up a quiet life as teacher and become a paralegal trainer and human rights advocate. The following year, she established the Legal Literacy Project of the Catholic Women's League of Tonga. Under her competent stewardship, the LLP has steadily expanded in both size and outreach, with 18 certified community paralegals now covering the whole of Tonga and 2 outer islands.

The Legal Literacy Project's (LLP) primary focus are the women and children in Tonga. It pursues its mission by actively reaching out to women and children in Tonga's districts and villages. Its community paralegals conduct human rights awareness training, educating people about their legal rights and advising them how better to access government services. LLP's outreach efforts cover topics as diverse as good governance, international and domestic human rights law, gender discrimination and family law, as well as development and poverty reduction.

Ms. Blake and the LLP also tackle important political and legal issues in Tonga. In 2003, the LLP actively protested constitutional amendments limiting free speech, helping to organize a march by 7000 people and delivering a petition with 10,000 signatures to Parliament. The organization successfully petitioned Tonga's parliament to ban casinos and gaming clubs in Tonga. For these efforts, Mrs. Blake was one of 35 nominees from the Pacific Region for the 2005 "1000 women for the Nobel Prize" campaign.

Ms. Blake's profile as a human rights advocate increased dramatically following riots on November 16, 2006 in the capital Nuku'alofa. In the days following the riots, Tongan security personnel arrested large numbers of people and reports began to arise of large scale abuse of detainees. Ms. Blake emerged as a key player in an independent investigation into these allegations. To

conduct this investigation, the LLP and other NGOs in Tonga formed the Community Paralegal Taskforce (Taskforce). Following a detailed study, the Taskforce published its report in May 2007.

The report documented accusations of widespread abuse of detainees by Tongan security personnel in the wake of the November riots. The Report also documented severely overcrowded and unsanitary detention conditions. While Tonga's government rejected the report, it received international attention. In its recommendations, the Taskforce urged Tonga's government to investigate the abuse, to review prison conditions and in places of detention, and to put in place measures to prevent the recurrence of abuses under a State of Emergency.

For these ongoing efforts to educate and empower women and children in Tonga, the Embassy is proud to nominate Ms. Blake for the Secretary of State's International Women of Courage Award.

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14. Emboffs following women's issues at post:

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